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Mountain Home

Mountain Home

Front view of the Walker house.

(Overleaf) Entrance to the Walker Farmstead as it appeared in 1962. Photograph by Jack E. Boucher, NPS.

Mountain Home

The Walker Family Farmstead

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Robert R. Madden
T. Russell Jones

U.S. Department of the Interior / National Park Service
Washington D.C. 1977

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interest of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. Administration.

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Introduction

This booklet is based on research into the history of the Walker family and on a study of their home (in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park) and the home's furnishings. These reports, prepared by Park Service personnel, have been combined into a single volume to provide a greater appreciation of the Appalachian Mountain people and their ways. It is offered as a tribute to those people who met the challenge of the mountains and who took delight in the life that those mountains gave.

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park not only preserves some of the most scenic areas of the Appalachians, it also testifies to the fortitude of those first settlers who came to its densely forested peaks and valleys. These first families, arriving in the late 1700's, used old Indian trails through the mountains and along the streams. They cleared the land for crops, orchards, and grazing. Some became dissatisfied and moved on in the 1830's to Georgia's newly opened Indian lands. However, their vacated farms were soon reoccupied by new families.

The rugged terrain had a profound influence on the population. Some of the old trails and roadways still intact in the Park testify to the arduous travel conditions of those pre-automobile times. Despite these limitations, mail routes were begun in the area by 1832, and together with circuit preachers, tradesmen, school teachers, and livestock drivers, limited contact with the "outside" was maintained. Lumbering operations further increased outside contacts, and with the advent of the automobile came the inexorable disintegration of the old ways.

The Walkers were resilient people who believed that dependence on any strength other than God's or their own was less than wholesome. Close family ties and a strong pioneer faith were practically inherent. They were resourceful, strong-willed, self-reliant, and had an abiding love for the land and their home. Technological advancements were not spurned, nor were they sought. Many, including some of their neighbors, thought the Walkers backward. Perhaps they were, but in their beloved mountains, their lifestyle represented a deliberate choice.

The Walker family homesite, one of a few remaining original mid-19th century farmsteads in the Park, today consists of a log house, a spring-house, and a corn crib. Also on the site are the foundations of other log and frame structures, as well as remnants of split rail fences, fields and orchards, and roads and trails.

As part of its responsibility to maintain not only the Park's natural resources but also significant evidences of man's activities there, the Park Service is preserving and stabilizing the three remaining original structures on the Walker farm. And in that setting, the park visitor can acquire a greater appreciation for the Great Smokies environment and the culture it nurtured.

Editor's Note

All quotations of the Walker sisters appearing in this booklet were taken from interviews by the authors, from the Walker family Bible, or were recorded by friends of the family and sisters and made available to the authors. Those who may wish fuller documentation of the quoted material are referred to the original manuscript on file at Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Grandparents and Parents

John N. Walker, the father of the Walker sisters, was born March 3, 1841. He was the oldest of fifteen children born to Thomas and Eliza Walker. Because of his full beard, he was locally known in later life as "Hairy John" Walker to distinguish him from others of the same name. Nothing is known of John Walker's childhood, but by 1860 he was engaged to marry Margaret Jane King. Margaret Jane, born July 18, 1846, was the daughter of Wylie and Mary Jane (Adair) King. It is not known when the Walkers came to that section of the Smokies, but Wylie King was in Little Greenbrier at least by 1830.

The marriage of John Walker and Margaret Jane King was considerably delayed by the Civil War. John, like most East Tennesseans, was an ardent Unionist. He had no sympathy whatsoever for the Confederate cause. He and other young men of the area made elaborate plans to steal away and enlist in the Union Army, thus avoiding Confederate military service. At the proper time, a signal bonfire was lit atop Bluff Mountain and the men gathered, marched north, and eventually enlisted in a Union military unit. Family tradition says John Walker was an enlisted man in the First Tennessee Light Artillery. It also alleges that Walker apparently fought in one battle, and was captured. He supposedly spent one hundred days in a Confederate prison and lost one hundred pounds before being exchanged. He told his children of starvation and ill-treatment while a prisoner, but he also told them of a sympathetic southern farmer who eased his hunger pangs when he dumped a wagon load of pumpkins into the prison compound.

After his exchange and a period of convalescence at home, Walker traveled to Cleveland, Ohio where he was officially discharged, and thus became eligible for a pension which he later received. An examination of the pension index cards for Union veterans at the National Archives failed, however, to disclose any reference to him.

On his return from the war, John resumed his courtship with Margaret Jane King, which culminated in their marriage on March 29, 1866. They initially settled on his father's place in Buckeye at the foot of Cove Mountain in Wear's Valley, but a growing family with commensurate responsibilities forced Walker to begin a search for a place of his own.

Wylie King, Walker's father-in-law, died in 1859, and most of his children had moved away. His widow continued to reside in Little Greenbrier, but was undoubtedly finding life more difficult as her children moved away. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that she welcomed John Walker's suggestion that he move his family to Little Greenbrier. The move was made in the late 1860's or early 1870's.

Eleven children were born to John and Margaret Jane Walker. Walker was a good provider for his family, and was regarded as a skilled craftsman in a land where every man was his own handyman. It is said he could make practically anything from wood, leather, or metal.

Like most men of the area, Walker was first a farmer, but was equally competent as a blacksmith, carpenter, grist miller, herder, and builder. He made much of the furniture for his own home and his children's homes, including not only beds, tables, and chairs, but also looms and spinning wheels. He constructed many of the outbuildings that stood around the Little Greenbrier home, and made improvements and an addition to the house itself. It is said that he could build an entire wagon, "from the ground up."

Walker is remembered by his children and grandchildren as a kindly man much devoted to his family. Existing photographs of Walker (fig. 1) show him with a full gray beard reaching his chest. He was fond of his children, and each fall took his boys on a two-week fishing and hunting trip high in the Smokies. One granddaughter remembers sitting in his lap, playing with his beard while he made a child's wooden whistle for her.

Figure 1.
John N. Walker, photographed around 1918 by his son-in-law, Jim Shelton. Walker was about 77 years old at the time. The fine cherries were grown in his orchard.

Politically, Walker was a strong Republican. He often told his children that he cast his first presidential ballot for Abraham Lincoln. He was an equally ardent Primitive Baptist, raised all his children in that faith, and Margaret Jane, reared a Methodist, embraced her husband's faith upon their marriage.

Margaret Jane was no less an accomplished individual. The very fact that she was able to bear eleven children and raise them to maturity made her exceptional even for her time and place. Perhaps her skill as a "herb doctor" was a major factor. Margaret Jane, no doubt, learned her "doctoring" from her mother who was a midwife and "herb doctor." John Walker often boasted that in his life he had spent a total of fifty cents for the services of a medical doctor, and that was for medicine for two of his sons who contracted measles while away at school. Margaret Jane could face danger with the stoic courage that was so common among her kind. The story is told that one day she heard one of her hens making a great deal of noise, as if something were killing it. She went to the hen, and at first saw nothing wrong. But she soon noticed that a weasel had her hen by the neck. She grabbed the vermin, but it was able to bite her thumb and hold so securely that she couldn't get it off. She calmly walked to the wash tub and thrust her hand, weasel and all, under water. It drowned in water stained by Margaret Jane's blood. She commented that she knew "sooner or later it would turn loose."

As in most mountain homes, the wife was the first to die, and Margaret died January 15, 1909, at the age of sixty-two. John Walker lived until April 23, 1921. In death they left their children a legacy similar to that which their parents had left them: a love of God, an intimate knowledge and experience of hard work, and a love of home and family.

John N. Walker's Family

The eleven children raised by John and Margaret Jane Walker in the order of their birth were: James Thomas, William Wylie, Margaret Jane, John Henry, Mary Elizabeth (called Polly), Martha Ann, Nancy Melinda, Louisa Susan, Sarah Caroline, Hettie Rebecca, and Giles Daniel. James Thomas and William Wylie were born in Buckeye, the others in Little Greenbrier.

The early years of the Walker children were no worse, perhaps better, than what was considered normal in the mountains. They worked a lot, played when they could, and unconsciously acquired the knowledge needed to live in partnership with the mountains. The two older boys went to school in Wear's Valley, while the remainder went through the six grades at Little Greenbrier School. Tragically, some sessions were only a month and a half in duration. They were all remembered as above-average students. Of the eleven, only William Wylie and John Henry were educated above the sixth grade level. They both finished high school and attended a college in Sevierville for a short time. Both were later to teach at Little Greenbrier.

As they grew older, the boys found wives and moved out of the Walker house. James Thomas married a daughter of the Cole family who lived near the Chimney Tops. They had three children before her death. His second wife was "Tip" Stennett's daughter. William Wylie and John Henry also married and moved away, leaving only the girls and the youngest boy, Giles Daniel. Sarah Caroline married Jim Shelton in 1908. They were married in the Walker house (fig. 2).

Hettie Martha Nancy Caroline

Margaret Louisa Mary Elizabeth (Polly)

Figure 2. The seven Walker sisters. The negative for this photograph was made in about 1909 by Caroline's husband, Jim Shelton, from a photograph taken at an earlier, unknown date.

THE JOHN N. WALKER FAMILY*

Name	Relation	Date of Birth	Date of Death
John N. Walker	Father	March 3, 1841	April 23, 1921
Margaret Jane King Walker	Mother	July 18, 1846	January 15, 1909
James Thomas Walker	Son	February 22, 1867	?
William Wylie Walker	Son	September 2, 1868	February 5, 1929
Margaret Jane Walker	Daughter	August 29, 1870	December 20, 1962
John Henry Walker	Son	October 20, 1872	December 6, 1942
Mary Elizabeth (Polly) Walker	Daughter	February 6, 1875	June 14, 1945
Martha Ann Walker	Daughter	July 8, 1877	July ? 1952
Nancy Melinda Walker	Daughter	January 31, 1880	July 2, 1931
Louisa Susan Walker	Daughter	December 23, 1882	July 13, 1964
Sarah Caroline Walker Shelton†	Daughter	February 6, 1886	February 5, 1966
Hettie Rebecca Walker	Daughter	July 4, 1889	December 24, 1947
Giles Daniel Walker	Son	October 10, 1891	Deceased

*Information taken from the Walker family *Bible*.
†Only Walker daughter to marry.

Although Sarah Caroline was the only daughter to marry, it was thought that others would marry. Martha was engaged to a man named John Daniels, and Polly (Mary Elizabeth) was to have married a logger named Cotter. Both men died accidental deaths. Polly apparently grieved so that she was taken ill. The illness affected her brain, and left her mind unsettled for the rest of her life.

It is said that the oldest sister, Margaret Jane, never courted with any man. She apparently selected spinsterhood early in her life and through reasoning and ridicule attempted to influence her sisters in like manner. Obviously she was

successful, but it is not known if there were other factors involved. In this respect, the six spinstered Walker sisters were not characteristic of mountain women who usually married early in life.

The youngest boy, Giles Daniel, left home after 1910, and wandered over the country to Idaho. He was drafted during World War I, and fought in numerous engagements, including the Argonne Forest. After his departure, the only Walker children who remained in the Little Greenbrier home were Margaret Jane, Polly, Martha Ann, Nancy Melinda, Louisa Susan, and Hettie Rebecca. These were the well-known Walker sisters. They continued to live in the Little Greenbrier house until they died one by one. Nancy died first on July 2, 1931. The last to die was Louisa Susan on July 3, 1964. Although Sarah Caroline lived until February 5, 1966, she did not reside in the Little Greenbrier house.

The Land and the House

The land on which the Walker sisters' house is located is in Little Greenbrier or Five Sisters' Cove in Sevier County, Tennessee.

The first known owner of this land was John Renfro, who acquired 2,000 acres on January 29, 1824. Nothing is known of Renfro, but on December 10, 1838, he conveyed 400 acres of this land to Brice McFalls. At a later date, McFalls conveyed the north 205 acres of this tract to William Richardson, and Richardson's heirs deeded the land to Wiley

King on February 2, 1853. After King's death, the land eventually went to his son-in-law, John N. Walker. Walker was forced into court to acquire complete ownership, but these legal problems are discussed later. Walker conveyed part of his tract to his unmarried daughters on May 29, 1909, and a portion to his son, Giles Daniel, on the same day. Giles Daniel deeded his portion to the unmarried sisters on September 30, 1921. The land was owned by the Walker sisters until they sold their 122.8 acres to the U.S. Government in 1940.

It is likely that Brice McFalls made the first improvements on the land. Although it cannot be substantiated, McFalls probably built the log house that was later dismantled and added to the Walker sisters' house as a kitchen. The probable construction date is in the early 1840's. Oddly enough, nothing is known of William Richardson except that he acquired the land at an unspecified date and conveyed it to Wiley King in 1853.

Wiley King moved his family into the existing log cabin, but soon started construction of another cabin about four hundred yards distant. At the time of Wiley's death in 1859, the second cabin was completed except for a portion of the chimney. His sons finished this. The new cabin was a two-room, two-storied log cabin. Wiley was probably living there at the time of his death. Ownership of the land apparently passed to his ten surviving children, each receiving a one-tenth share.

Most of Wiley's children were probably married and had left their parental home at the time of his death, but his widow continued to live in the cabin until her death on June 3, 1886. The last of Wylie's children to marry was Margaret Jane, who married John N. Walker in 1866. Margaret Jane moved away for a period of about four years, but by 1870 had returned with her husband and children. Shortly after his marriage, John Walker began buying the heirs' shares of the King land. His wife, of course, held one share, and on October 6, 1868, he purchased shares from five other heirs, thus giving him six-tenths undivided interest in the whole tract. Walker purchased each share for $10.00 which was, no doubt, a token payment. The other four heirs refused to sell to Walker for some unknown reason, but they apparently made no objection when he moved his family into the King house.

The expanding Walker family soon outgrew the house, and John was forced to dismantle the old "McFalls cabin" and use a portion of it as a kitchen addition to his house (fig. 3). He added the porch at the same time (fig. 4). The exact date of this addition is not known, but was probably in the late 1870's. This was the only major change that was made to the house. In later years, the shingle roof was periodically replaced, and on one occasion a new board floor was installed. This is the existing floor.

Over the years, Walker constructed numerous outbuildings around the house (figs. 5-10). These included a barn, pig pen, corn crib-gear shed, smokehouse, applehouse, springhouse, blacksmith shop, grist mill with a wood-turning lathe, and a poultry yard. One structure not present that one might have expected to be there was an outhouse. The Walker family used the woods, with the women using the woods below the house, and the men using the woods above the house. In later years, men in the family offered on several occasions to build the Walker sisters a toilet facility, but Margaret Jane refused. She did not want the odor that would result, and said that people would see it and know what it was for, and this would cause her embarrassment.

Walker also constructed a tar kiln, ash hopper, charcoal-making pit, drying racks, bee gums, rail and stone fences, and a poultry yard. Walker planted valuable apple, chestnut, peach, plum, and cherry orchards on his land, and cleared many suitable acres for the cultivation of corn and other less important crops. He fenced pastures and laid out a garden directly behind the house. Some years later, the size of the garden was doubled and the entire plot was fenced with hemlock palings.

The farm began to take shape, and Walker was, no doubt, justly proud of his labors. Perhaps the future appeared serene to him, but any such feelings were abruptly shattered in the 1890's when his ownership of the farm was contested by a distant relative. Bettie A. King, one of Wylie King's granddaughters, managed to acquire two of the four one-tenth shares not owned by Walker, and apparently convinced the owners of the other two shares to join her. After the death of Wylie King's widow in 1886, Bettie was convinced that John Walker should pay rent and a share of the

Figure 3. General view of the back of the Walker house. The older McFalls cabin was reassembled and attached to the main house and used for the kitchen. Photograph was taken in 1962 by Jack E. Boucher, NPS.

Figure 4. Front view of the Walker house. The kitchen is immediately behind the porch. Photograph was taken in 1962 by Jack E. Boucher, NPS.

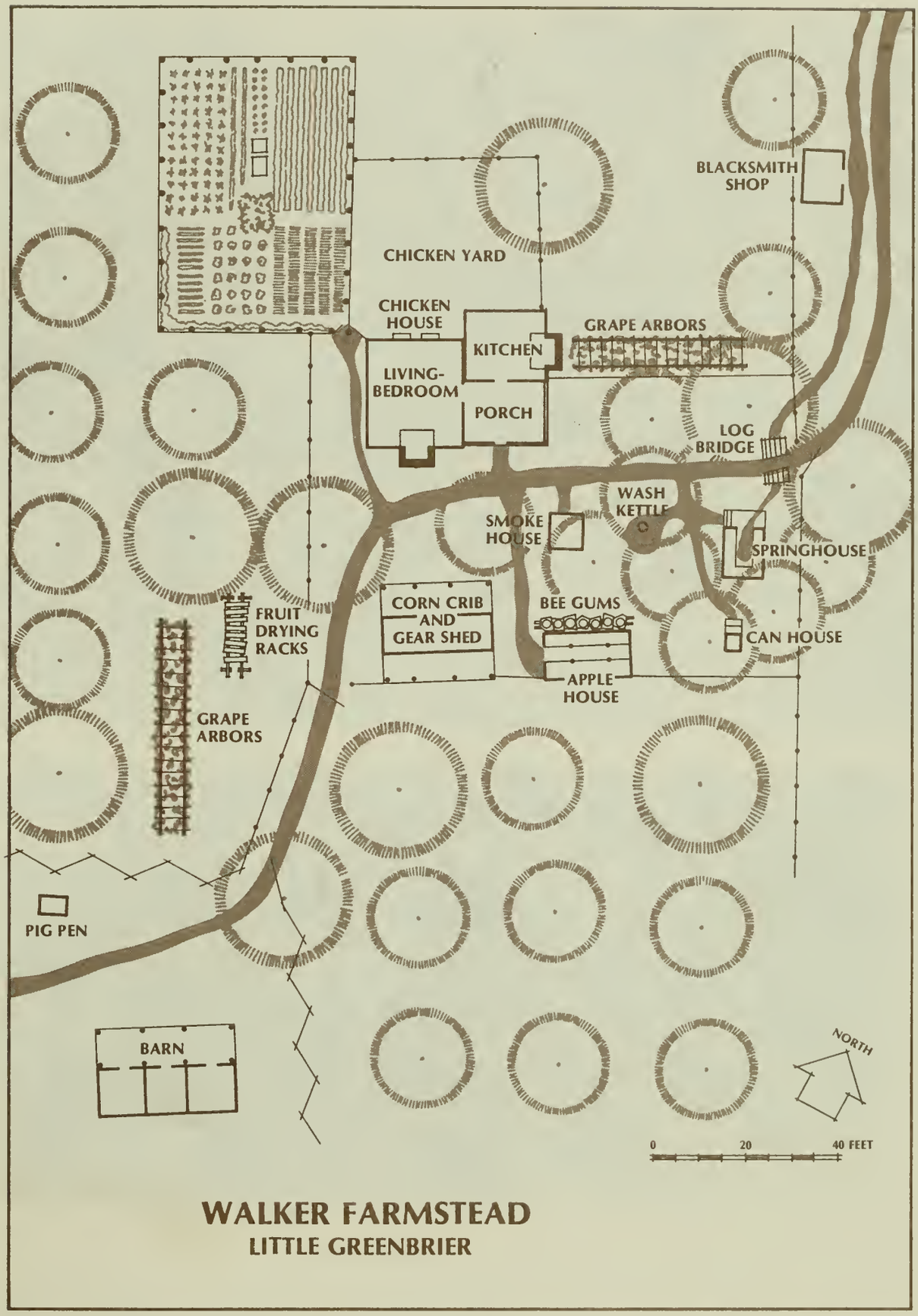

Figure 5. Schematic drawing of the Walker farmstead as it appeared at its height of productivity.

6.

7.

Figure 6. The barn as photographed in 1936 by E. E. Exline.

Figure 7. The blacksmith shop was already in disrepair by the time of this photograph in 1936.

10.

8.

9.

Figure 8. The springhouse where dairy products and other foods were kept cool in the summer months. Photograph by E. E. Exline, 1936.

Figure 9. The pig pen as it appeared in 1936. E. E. Exline.

Figure 10. The corn crib and gear shed as it looked in 1936. Immediately to the right of the shed is Hettie Walker and an unidentified family member or friend. E. E. Exline.

profits to the other shareholders. Walker was not overly anxious to do this, so Bettie filed suit. The resulting judgment decreed that the four shares of land not owned by Walker be put up for sale at public auction. John Walker's bid of $300 was high, and on April 25, 1893, he finally became the sole owner of the Little Greenbrier property.

A mountain farm is, by its very nature, not overly productive, but the Walkers suffered no serious privation. It is doubtful that they ever went hungry. Practically all essential commodities were produced on the farm. Luxuries were scarce, but were usually considered useless or sinful. The house was well built and, though crowded at times, was a fine home for John Walker's family. Perhaps the family's love of the house is best described in the following excerpt from a poem written by Louisa Walker entitled "My Mountain Home":

> There is an old weather bettion house
> That stands near a wood
> With an orchared near by it
> For all most one hundred years it has stood
>
> It was my home in infency
> It sheltered me in youth
> When I tell you I love it
> I tell you the truth
>
> For years it has sheltered
> By day and night
> From the summer sun's heat
> And the cold winter blight.

The remainder of the poem is quoted to provide a statement of events to come and a testament to their religious fervor:

> But now the park Commissioner
> Comes all dressed up so gay
> Saying this old house of yours
> We must now take away

They coax they wheedle
They fret they bark
Saying we have to have this place
For a National Park

For us poor mountain people
They don't have a care
But must a home for
The wolf the lion and the bear

But many of us have a title
That is sure and will hold
To the City of peace
Where the streets are pure gold

There no lion in its fury
Those pathes ever trod
It is the home of the soul
In the presence of God

When we reach the portles
of glory so fair
The Wolf cannot enter
Neather the lion or bear

And no park Commissioner
Will ever dar
To desturbe or molest
Or take our home from us there.

The Walker house as it now exists, and as it has existed since the 1870's, is a three-room, two-storied log house, with a front porch running the length of the kitchen. Changes to the exterior appearance of the house were few, and were caused more by time and natural weathering than by man. The appearance of the interior of the house could best be described by the term "organized confusion." The walls were papered with newspapers and magazines, and adorned with anything that might strike the family's fancy (fig. 11). Calendars, especially "Cardui" calendars; letter and note boxes made from cardboard boxes; lanterns; pictures—family, religious, or simply decorative; clocks; dried food;

Figure 11. View of the living room-bedroom and detail of wall. In this 1936 photograph, Hettie Walker is nearest the camera and Polly is in the background.

bags of seeds; spice racks; mementos from family or friends; greeting cards; or simply "anything that could be hung on a nail" were usually found on the interior walls. The rafters of all three rooms were studded with nails or wooden pegs which supported items beyond description. Bags of seeds, any kind of dried food, clothing, guns, walking sticks or crutches, kitchen utensils, magazines, and baskets were a few of the staggering number of items that hung from the ceilings of all the rooms. Every available inch of space was used for something.

The bottom room of the "big house" contained six beds (one a trundle bed), at least two chests, a sewing machine, and several chairs along with other smaller pieces of furniture (fig. 12). Immediately in front of the large fireplace was a potato cellar for sweet potatoes (fig. 13). The kitchen was equally crowded, containing a table with benches and chairs, two stoves, cupboard, meal and flour bin made from a hollow gum log, salt gum, work table, water shelf, jelly box, and other smaller items. Another potato cellar was located in front of the kitchen fireplace and was used for storage of Irish potatoes. The upper floor of the "big house," which was reached by a ladder from the room below, contained three beds, chest, chairs, and other smaller items. There was a storage loft above the kitchen that was "multi-purpose" in the broadest sense of the word. When asked what was stored there, one source said, "Lord, everything."

The grounds around the house were literally carpeted with flowers and flowering shrubs. All the sisters were especially fond of flowers, and took great pains with the cultivation of any kind of flower they could find. It is said that they had "an awful lot of flowers, probably over 100 varieties." Roses, lilac, snowball bushes, yucca, rose-of-sharon, and hydrangea were a few of the many. Also located around the house were rock piles, dozens of them, in all the cleared areas.

BED
BED
BEDROOM
BED
SECOND FLOOR

FLOOR PLANS

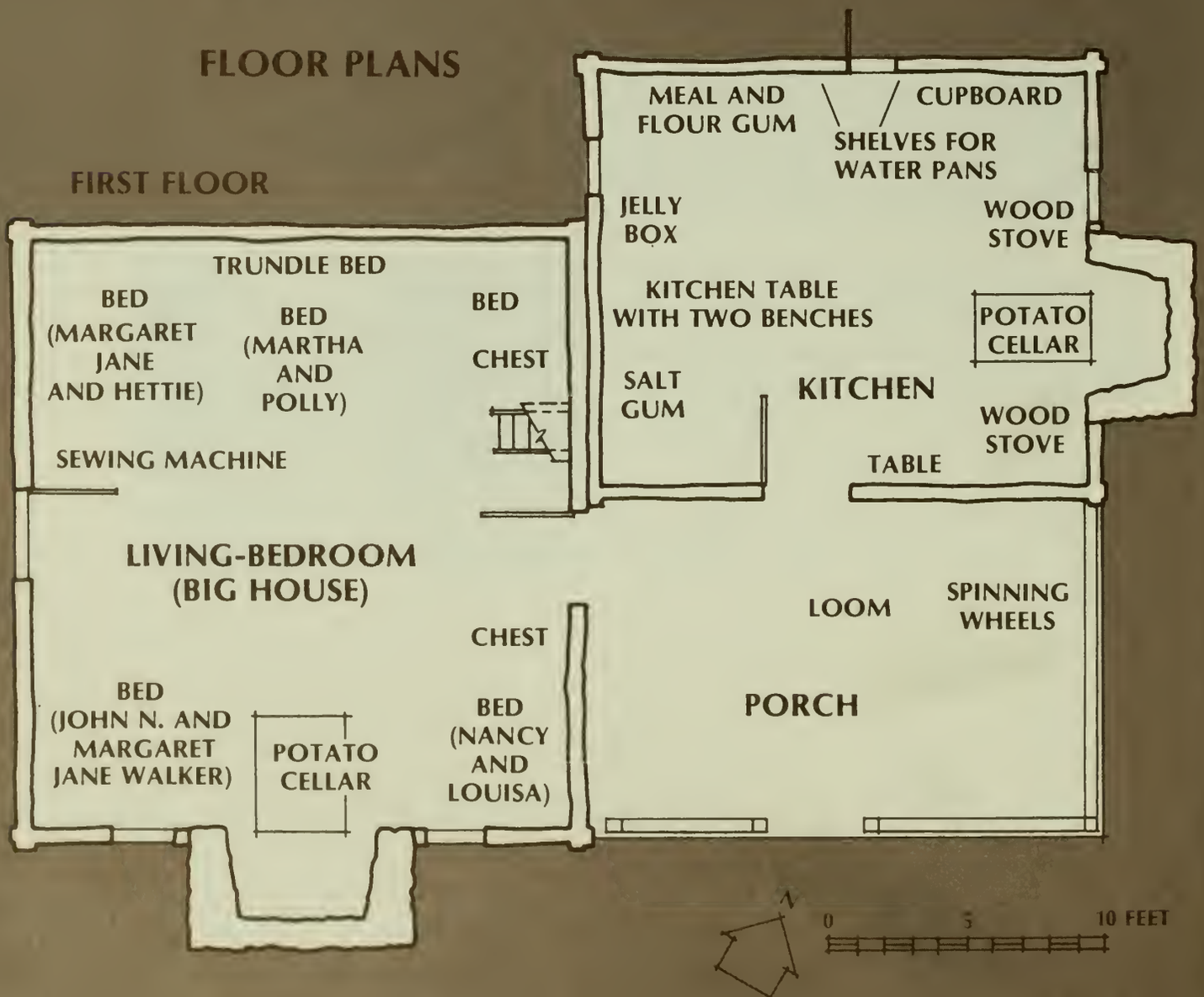
FIRST FLOOR
MEAL AND FLOUR GUM
CUPBOARD
SHELVES FOR WATER PANS
JELLY BOX
WOOD STOVE
TRUNDLE BED
BED (MARGARET JANE AND HETTIE)
BED (MARTHA AND POLLY)
BED
CHEST
KITCHEN TABLE WITH TWO BENCHES
POTATO CELLAR
SALT GUM
KITCHEN
WOOD STOVE
SEWING MACHINE
TABLE
LIVING-BEDROOM (BIG HOUSE)
LOOM
SPINNING WHEELS
CHEST
BED (JOHN N. AND MARGARET JANE WALKER)
POTATO CELLAR
BED (NANCY AND LOUISA)
PORCH
N
0
5
10 FEET

Figure 13. The living room-bedroom looking towards the fireplace. To the left of the hearth is Hettie Walker.

◄ **Figure 12. Floor plan of the Walker home showing locations of the major pieces of furniture.**

Life at the Walker House

"Work" was the cornerstone of the Walker family's lives. In all seasons, at all times there were chores to be done. They chose to live as their father and grandfather had lived, and in so doing they made their labors slow and arduous. This is especially true in regard to the sisters, for they lived a life that had passed decades earlier. Money was rarer than leisure, and the Walkers, along with most mountain people, learned to live in a "make do or do without" environment. From early age until death, all family members were expected to produce for the common good.

Securing an adequate supply of food was a primary concern of the Walkers. Corn was the main crop and dietary item, but it was supplemented by as wide a variety of foods as could be found on any mountain table. A vegetable garden (fig. 14), located immediately behind the house, contained "everything—all the vegetables usually found in a garden and then some." A herb garden was also located in the garden plot and contained a wide variety of medicinal herbs and teas. Horseradish, boneset, catnip, indian turnip, and pepermint were a few of many. The size of the original garden was doubled in the early 1900's and the hemlock paling fence was installed. Jim Shelton and John N. Walker made the palings and fence. Sweet potatoes and late Irish potatoes were grown behind the apple house.

As already mentioned, the Walkers had prized apple, chestnut, peach, plum, pear, and cherry trees (fig. 15). In addition, there was a large grape arbor above the house and a blue Concord grapevine in the garden. The apple orchard contained at least twenty varieties, including Red Milams,

Figure 14. View of the garden. Note the grape arbor in the lower right. The figure near the house is unidentified in this 1936 photograph.

Figure 15. Another ca. 1918 photograph, showing John Walker proudly displaying an apple from his orchard.

Limber Twigs, Ben Davis, Roman Beauties, Red Junes, Abrahams, Buckinghams, Shockleys, Sour Johns, and others. The apples from different trees ripened in different seasons insuring a steady supply of fresh fruit, and preventing a deluge of apples from one harvest to be peeled and dried. During good years, the orchard provided surplus fruit, especially chestnuts, that could be marketed for badly needed cash.

Animals provided food, labor, and cash when sold. The Walkers kept a large flock of sheep until later years when dogs, too numerous to control, began to kill them. Mutton was the most common meat on the Walker's table. Pork was the next most common meat; beef was a rarity. "The truth is that mountain beef, being fed nothing but grass and browse, with barely enough corn and roughage to keep the animals alive through the winter, is blue-fleshed, watery, and tough." Also, beef was the most difficult meat to preserve.

After securing the food, the family still faced an equally demanding task of preserving it. Initially, most of the food was either dried, salted, or pickled. They built drying racks outside, hung poles over the inside fireplaces, and on occasions used the roofs of various buildings for drying racks. Apples, pumpkins, peaches, beans, and some beef were a few of the foods they dried. Beef and pumpkins were usually hung on the drying poles before the fireplaces. Jim Shelton remembers that they built fires out on the fireplace hearths to make sure the beef was thoroughly smoked. Obviously, the rest of the room was also thoroughly smoked! After drying, they normally strung the food and hung it from nails and pegs located throughout the house. Meat was later cured in a smokehouse that used a stove for quick drying, but most meat in earlier days was dried inside the house.

Pickled beans and kraut were kept in large crocks in the springhouse. Also located in the springhouse was the shelf for salted meat. (See fig. 9). In the fall, the men of the family butchered animals, usually hogs. They let the meat cool, then cleaned it and covered it with a crust of salt. The women arranged the meat in layers on a shelf in the springhouse and covered each layer with additional salt. They bought salt in one hundred pound bags and stored it in a hollow gum in the kitchen. It also served as table salt. Some fruit and root vegetables were stored fresh in the apple house.

Figure 16. Hettie, Martha, and Louisa Walker ginning cotton in front of their home.

Preparation of the food was a specialty of the Walker women. The Walkers served sumptuous meals that generally included a variety of foods. This was unusual in a land where the diet was often bland to the extreme. Jim Shelton especially remembers the pot of green beans that was often emptied and refilled, but seldom left the fireplace. (Originally they did all their cooking in the fireplace, but they eventually acquired two wood-burning cook stoves.) As in most households, Christmas dinners are remembered with sentimental affection. "They started cooking way before Christmas, and when we came on Christmas you could smell the food from way down the road." "They always had a big Christmas dinner. I haven't tasted a 'stack cake' like theirs in many a year."

Hard work was a way of life to the Walkers. They were born to it and appeared to thrive on it. Tasks that are taken for granted today involved long hours of labor for them (fig. 16). They made all their clothing, even weaving

Figure 17. Pictured on the front porch with the loom made by their father are, from left, Polly, Louisa, and Martha. Note the spinning wheel behind the loom, and the smoke house in the center background.

the heavy, itchy linsey-woolsey on a hand loom made by their father (fig. 17). Cloth for summer clothing was "store bought," but the garments were all hand made. Nancy, the fourth sister, had asthma and did most of the housework away from the pollen and dust of the fields. The other women spent a great deal of time in the fields and gardens. However, each spring they all pitched in for the spring cleaning. One rather unique chore here was to "scald the walls." All the house furnishings were moved outside, and every inch of the interior was thoroughly scrubbed with boiling water. Newspapers and magazines were used to cover the walls and of necessity were replaced after each scalding.

The family had a flexible work routine, with each member bearing responsibility for specific chores. Margaret Jane assumed the position of "final decision-maker" after the death of her parents. She was also the "boss cook." Nancy was an excellent seamstress and "needlepoint woman," and

there "ain't no machine anywhere that could make buttonholes like Martha and Nancy."

Local tradition says the Walker sisters plowed the fields and gardens alongside the men. This is not true. They probably could have, but there were enough male relatives nearby to spare the women this difficult task. Jim Shelton clearly remembers the endurance and steadiness of "Buck" and "Dick," John Walker's two oxen. He also recalls the cussed stubborness of "Kit," their old mule. "He didn't know what the middle of the row was, went out of his way to step in the furrow." However, the sisters did sow and hoe the fields and protect the plants from weeds, crows, and other "varmints."

Social activities were few and were normally restricted to corn huskings and bean and pea shellings attended only by the family. They were not a socially active family, and outside of "church doings" rarely took part in organized activities. They attended church regularly at Little Greenbrier Primitive Baptist Church and later Headrick's Chapel. The entire family joined in church singings, especially Sacred Harp (shaped-note) singings. Their religion was most fundamental, and they were strong Republicans, although the sisters never voted. Two of the boys, John and Wiley, served as Superintendents of the Sunday School at Little Greenbrier, as did brother-in-law Jim Shelton.

Drinking, although not entirely unknown to the Walkers, was not tolerated, especially by the girls. When once asked by a visitor if they minded him smoking, Margaret Jane replied, "It'll only make two people sick, you and me." Jim Shelton was a self-taught banjo and guitar "picker," and passed the ability on to Dan Walker.

Contrary to popular belief, the Walker sisters saw more of the world than Little Greenbrier. Jim Shelton said he "was always taking them somewhere." The "somewhere," however, was always to some point in East Tennessee. They made a trip nearly every year to their church's conference held in various Tennessee towns, and paid a number of visits to their Uncle Charley Walker in Jefferson City, Tennessee.

They occasionally took outside jobs. Martha did domestic work for families near home, and agreed to "sleep in" in case of illness. At times she was away from home for

two or three weeks. Hettie even went to Knoxville for a "year or two" to work in a hosiery mill. While there, she boarded with her married sister Caroline, who worked in the same mill. The depression of the Twenties sent them all back to Little Greenbrier.

All the sisters were "herb doctors," as one visitor to their home discovered:

> One of the five well-known Walker sisters of Little Greenbrier had recently recovered from a case of "pneumonic fever," when I visited them briefly at their old-fashioned log house. For a remedy her sisters put "lamp oil" (kerosene) on a woolen cloth and placed the cloth on the chest, rubbing camphorated oil on the chest to keep the oil from burning. They explained, "we put the woolen cloth (on the chest) when the fever got high or when she got to smotherin'. We put it on just as hot as she could stand it." For teas efficacious against pneumonia, they employed boneset and catnip. Despite this expert care, the convalescing sister said, "I like to took a back-set when I got to knocking' about," that is when she got on her feet again.

To cure a rattlesnake bite, the Walker sisters bathed the affected part with lamp oil, turpentine, and Roger's liniment. Concerning one occasion when they used this remedy, one sister exclaimed, "you could just see the poison comin' out."

For times when a mild anesthetic was desired, they recommended "strong, hot, creamy coffee for dope."

The Walker sisters were well versed in the time honored medical lore of the Smokies.

The mainstay of the Walker sisters' healing potions was "Charley linament," a "soothing balm" of secret ingredients concocted by Uncle Charley Walker. It was a herb mixture that used Indian Turnip and May apple root along with many others, and is remembered as being "hot as hell's hinges" and "mighty powerful." For headache or fainting, it was rubbed on the temples. Charley linament on the chest helped coughs, colds, and other lung ailments; and stiffness was

eased by rubbing it into the muscle. In fact, it was used practically every way except internally.

They were considered old-fashioned, even by their neighbors in the Smokies in their later years. But, there was an air about them. Maybe it was a flashback to the dogged independence of mind and body that in another century was a characteristic of our country. Life with the Walkers was not an easy life, but there was laughter and love, and great pride and honor.

The Coming of the Park

"These old women are 'rooted to the soil.' We have always understood they were to be permitted to spend the rest of their lives on their property.... If they were ejected from the park, we should be subject to severe criticism, and in my opinion, justly so."

In the 1930's, something called a National Park entered the Walker sisters' lives and threatened to force them from their home. This was not to be, for they became the poor people versus government.

"On the afternoon of Saturday, July 8, 1939, I drove Mr. Myers of the Washington Office of the National Park Service to the Walker sisters' land in Little Greenbrier Cove. We spent a little over two hours there, Mr. Myers trying to talk up a trade with them....Mr. Myers advised them not to rely on their own judgment, but to consult their friends, kinfolks, and attorneys; but they replied that they didn't aim to talk it over with anyone else as nobody knew as much about what the place was worth as they did."

The slow, steady process of land acquisition began, and as other properties came under U.S. title, the Walker sisters resisted. Their land was appraised in March of 1939 for $5,446, and again in September of that year for $4,428. According to family tradition, the sisters agreed to sell for a prohibitive $15,000, but were convinced by their attorney that this was too high. Their first asking price listed in existing correspondence is $7,000. This was more than the government would pay and the sisters made compromise offers of $6,500 and $5,500, neither of which proved acceptable. A life-time lease was a primary part of each compromise of-

fered by the sisters. Finally in late 1940, faced with condemnation, they accepted $4,750 for their land, provided they were "allowed to reserve a life estate and the use of the land for and during the life of the five sisters." On January 22, 1941, ownership of the Walker sisters' land passed to the United States, but the sisters remained until their deaths.

The park came, and with it came visitors. The Walker sisters were oddities, to be viewed along with Cades Cove and the Cherokees of the Qualla Boundary. An article in the April 27, 1947, *Saturday Evening Post* brought them national publicity. The sisters and their home became an "island of self-sufficiency. . . almost a museum in itself."

They tried to make the visitors welcome, for they realized that although the visitors were often annoying, they were a source of income. Louisa wrote poems and had her nieces illustrate them. They were displayed for sale. They also made "things," small items associated with mountain life, that were offered for sale. The sisters even had a "visitors welcome" sign installed on the road leading to their house.

Figure 18. This 1962 photograph by Jack Boucher shows Margaret Walker, age 91 (in front) and Louisa, age 79, at the loom. Margaret died about 8 months after this photograph was taken. Louisa died in July 1964. ▶

Last Days

One by one, John and Margaret Walker's children died. The old house and outbuildings and fences were slowly rotting down. The family began to pass from the scene as had their way of life many years before. Perhaps they embraced death yearning for the promised reunion with family and friends. By 1953, there were only two of the sisters alive, Margaret and Louisa (figs. 18 and 19). The following poignant letter was written by the two women to the "Superintendant" of the park, and is quoted in its entirety.

To the Superintendant of the Great Smokie Mountain National Park

Dear Sir

I have a request to you Will you please have the Sign about the Walker Sisters taken down the one on High Way 73 especilay the reason I am asking this there is just 2 of the sisters lives at the old House place one is 70 years of age the other is 82 years of age and we can't receive so many visitors We are not able to do our Work and receive so many visitors, and can't make sovioners to sell like we once did and people will be expecting us to have them, last year we had so many people it kept us buisy from Sun up till sun down besides our own work We haven't bin feling very well this winter can't do much at our best. I write poems to sell but can't write very well I use to write of winter but I haven't bin able to do much for the 2 last ones My brother is in the hospital and cant stay with us much We mis his help We have a Grant Nephew and his wife with us now There was 5 of us living here when we began to receive visitors and we enjoyed meeting so many nice people from different places from every state in the union and many out side, some of them came every time they came to the park, there was more of us and we were more able to care for things, they bought things from us and made it easier to have spinding money. they buy things yet if we was abel to fix them but it is to confining on us now with no more help if we get to feeling better or get till we can receive them a gain we may want to receive them a gain but we want to rest a while it is to much work for us now. Come visit us if you have time.

Very Respectively

The Walker Sisters
Margaret and Louisa

The Walker sisters are remembered, not as five eccentric, old-maid mountain women, but as warm human elements in the story of the Great Smoky Mountains.

Figure 19. This photograph, taken at the same time as that of figure 18, more clearly shows Louisa's and Margaret's concession to wearing "store bought" clothing—a concession no doubt necessitated by the rigors of old age.

Postscript

The house is vacant now, and has been since the death of Louisa Walker in 1964. It stands in silent tribute to the Walker sisters endurance, self-reliance, and an unfailing adherence to those values and beliefs instilled in them by their parents.

The National Park Service is presently involved in restoring the house and two other intact buildings—the corncrib and springhouse. The Service's first priority is to preserve these treasures, and to someday open the farmstead to those park visitors interested in taking a glimpse at a way of life that has almost totally passed from the American scene.

Figure 20. The house, for so long the focal point of a bustling mountain farmstead, now stands empty.

Sources

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Knoxville News Sentinel, January 12, 1958.

Architecture

by Russell Jones

The Walker sisters complex, consisting of three structures, was measured in November 1968 and record drawings were prepared. Reduced copies of some of these drawings are included as part of this report.

House. The house is a three-room, one and a half story L-shaped log structure on a stone foundation. The one-and-a-half story portion measures 20 feet 6 inches by 22 feet 5-1/2 inches. The one-story kitchen ell, including the porch, measures 18 feet 4-3/4 inches by 27 feet 3 inches (figs. 21 and 22).

The walls are constructed of hewn logs and are joined at the corner for half-dovetail notching. The joints between logs are chinked with mud and small stones.

The porch is constructed of sawn board on hewn log framing and is enclosed by one rail set between four posts supporting the roof. A rock step appearing in historic photographs has been removed.

Access to the building is by three doors: from the porch to the kitchen, from the porch to the living-bedroom,

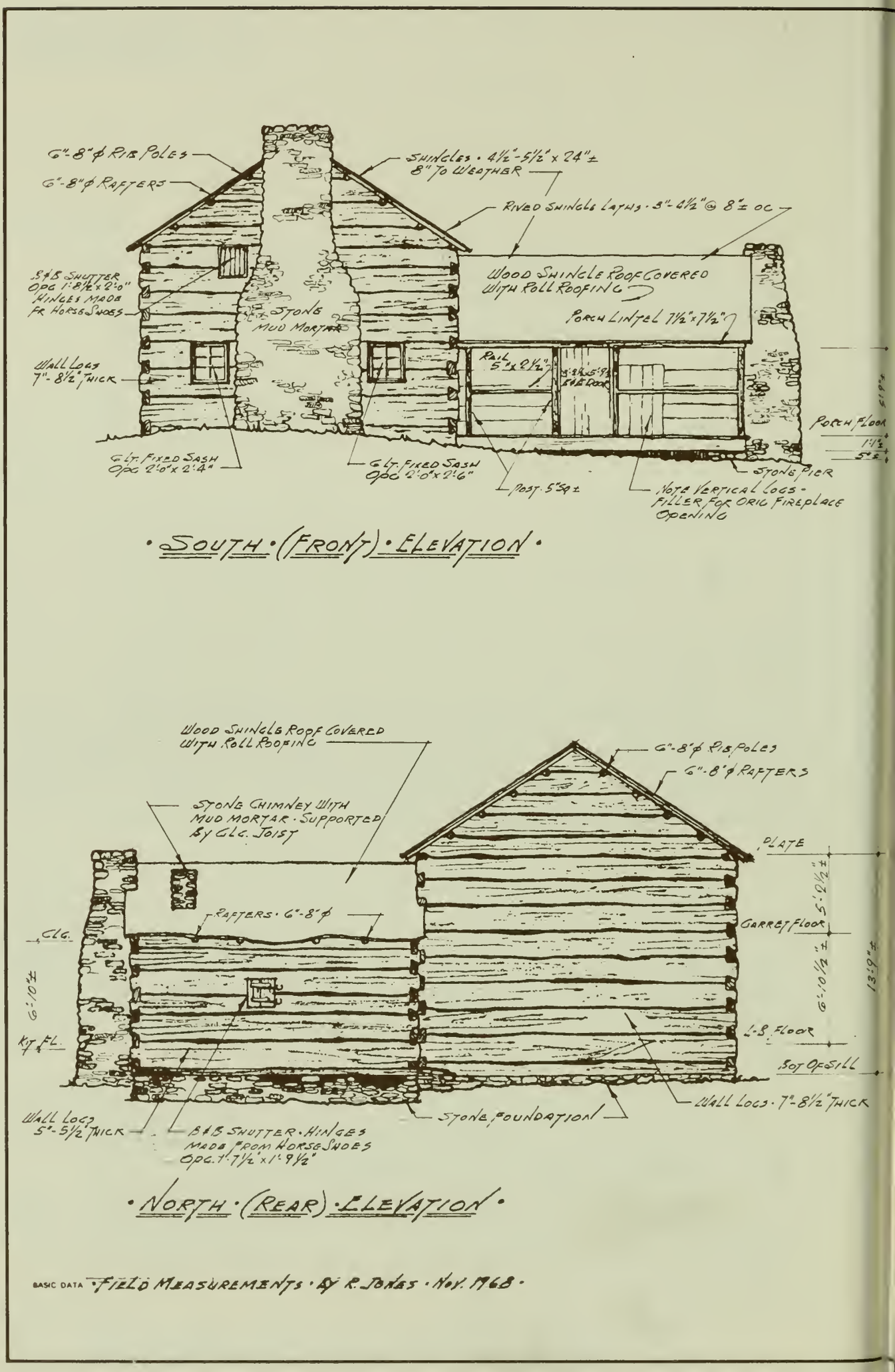
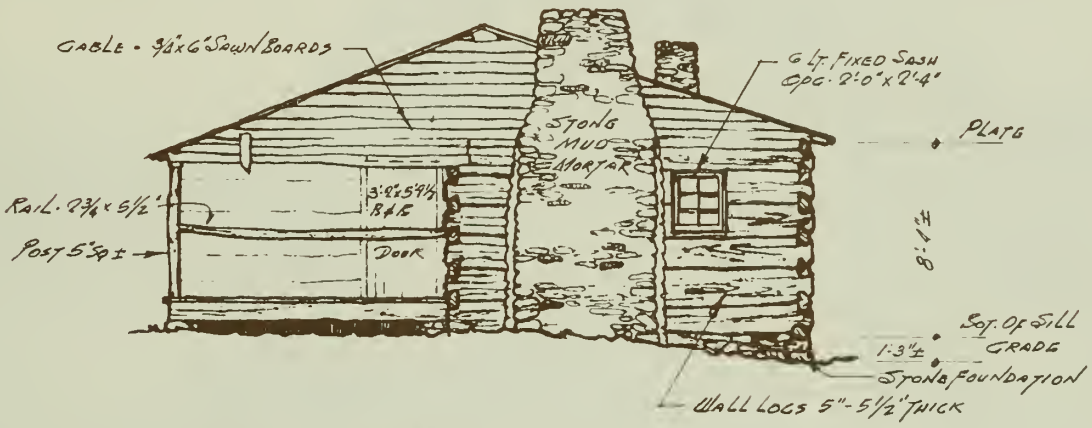
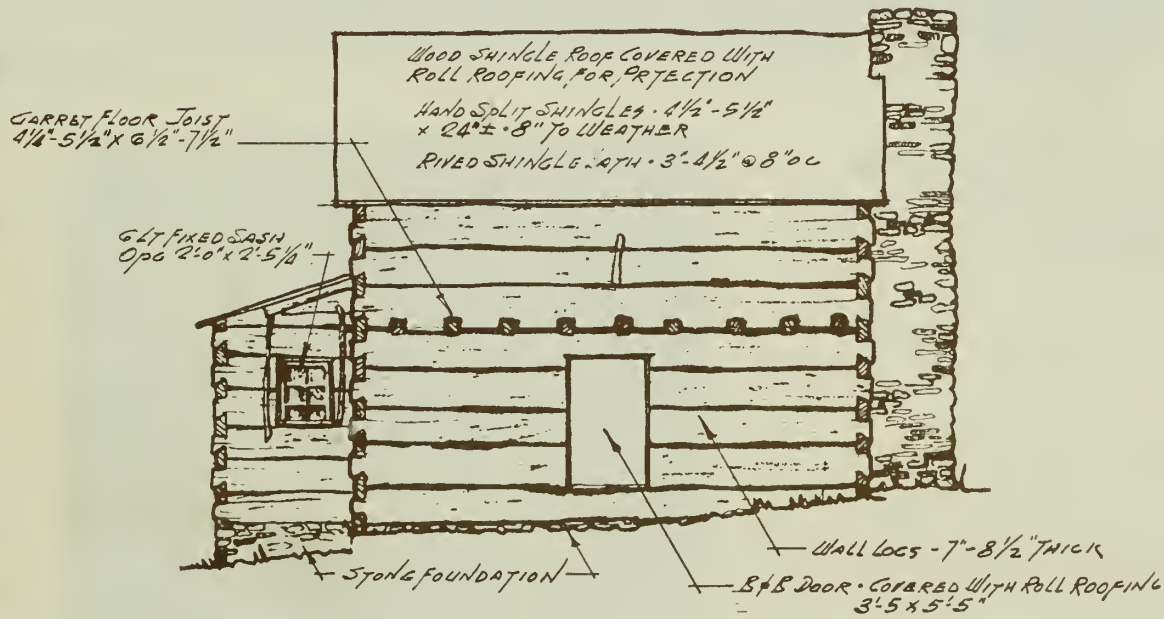


Figure 21. The north, east, south, and west elevations of the Walker house.



· EAST · ELEVATION ·


WOOD SHINGLE ROOF COVERED WITH ROLL ROOFING FOR PROTECTION
HAND SPLIT SHINGLES - 4 1/2" - 5 1/2" x 24" ± - 8" TO WEATHER
RIVED SHINGLE LATH - 3'-4 1/2" @ 8" OC
GARRET FLOOR JOIST 4 1/2" - 5 1/2" x 6 1/2" - 7 1/2"
6 LT FIXED SASH OPG 2'-0" x 2'-5 1/2"
WALL LOGS - 7" - 8 1/2" THICK
STONE FOUNDATION
B & B DOOR - COVERED WITH ROLL ROOFING 3'-5 x 5'-5"

· WEST · ELEVATION ·

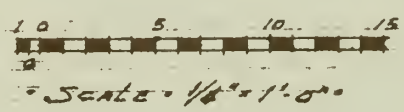


Figure 22. A 1936 photograph of the front of the house (see south elevation of figure 21).

Figure 23. Mountaineer ingenuity and resourcefulness are demonstrated by the use of horseshoes to replace worn-out hinges on the kitchen window (see north elevation in figure 21).

and from the living-bedroom in the west wall. The step for the latter door has also been removed. Access to the garret is by a ladder and crawl hole from the living-bedroom.

There are six windows, five on the first floor and one in the garrett. Four of the first-floor windows have single six-light sash. The two remaining windows are closed by wood shutters (fig. 23).

The kitchen and the living-bedroom are both heated by a fireplace and massive outside chimney constructed of field stones laid in mud mortar. A small stone chimney, supported by the kitchen ceiling has been added to receive a wood stove smoke pipe.

The kitchen and porch roof is framed with pole rafters and covered with wood shingles on shingle laths. The story and a half portion is framed with rib poles and pole rafters covered with wood shingles. Both roofs have been covered with roll roofing for protection and to prevent leaking.

Floors throughout the house are sawn boards. The garret floor is supported on hewn joists. The first floor joists were not inspected.

The interior walls of the living-bedroom have been partially covered with newspapers and magazine pages.

Corn Crib. The corn crib has a gabled roof, with single center crib and two side sheds. The crib is set on field stone piers, laid dry. Overall measurements are 24 feet 7-1/2 inches by 19 feet 8-1/2 inches (figs. 24 and 25).

The walls of the crib are constructed of hewn logs. The corner notching is half-dovetail.

The roof is framed with pole rafters supported at midspan by a purlin bearing on hewn log lookouts. The eaves are supported by post and beam. The roof is covered with wood shingles on shingle boards (fig. 26). The north half of the original roof has been covered with tin. The roof extends approximately 7 feet at the west end.

Access to the crib is by means of a small door in the west end that is hung on wrought iron strap hinges. Two harness racks are located at the east end and one at the west end of the north shed. The puncheon floor measures 3 to 4 inches thick and is laid transversely on the log sills.

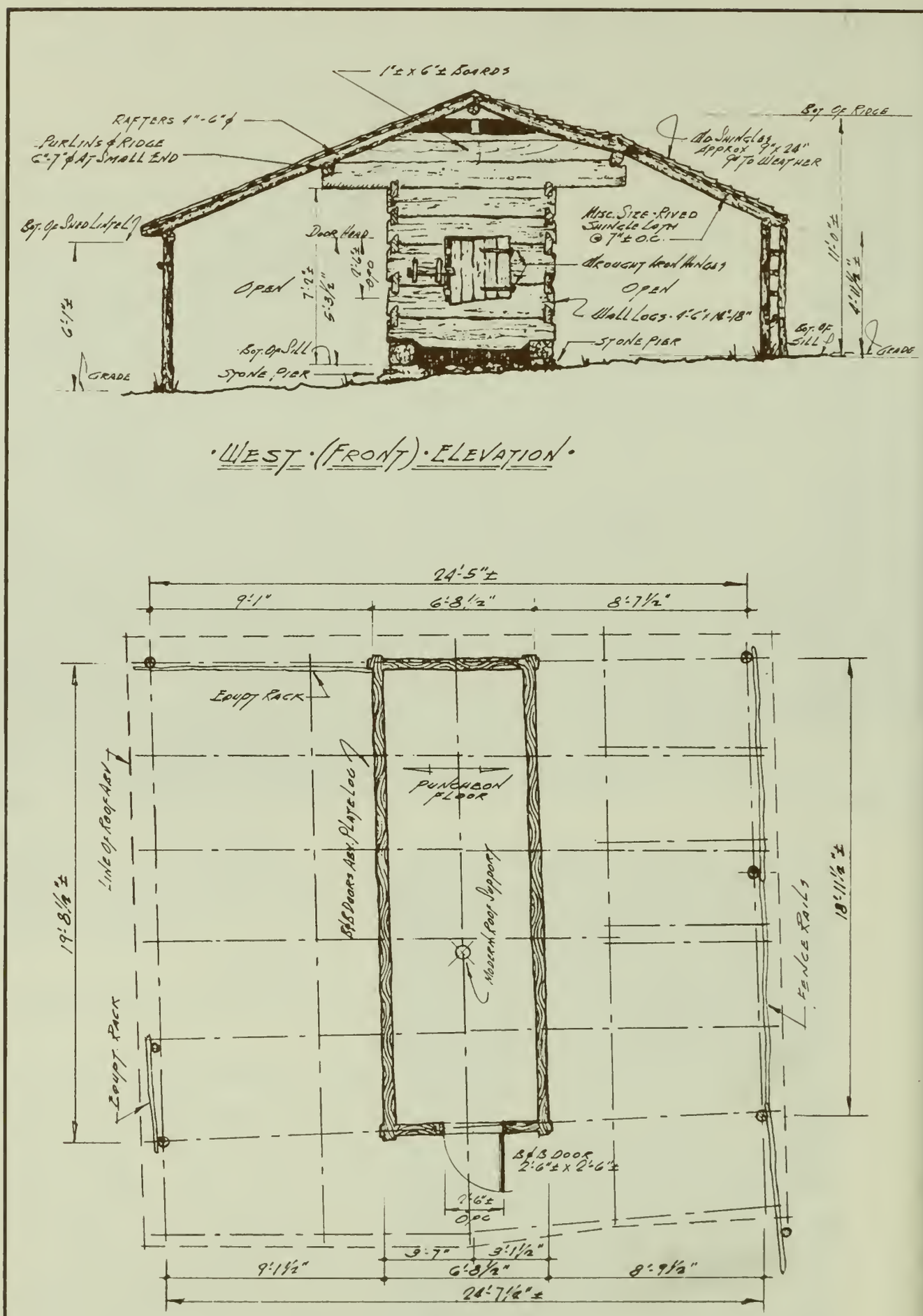
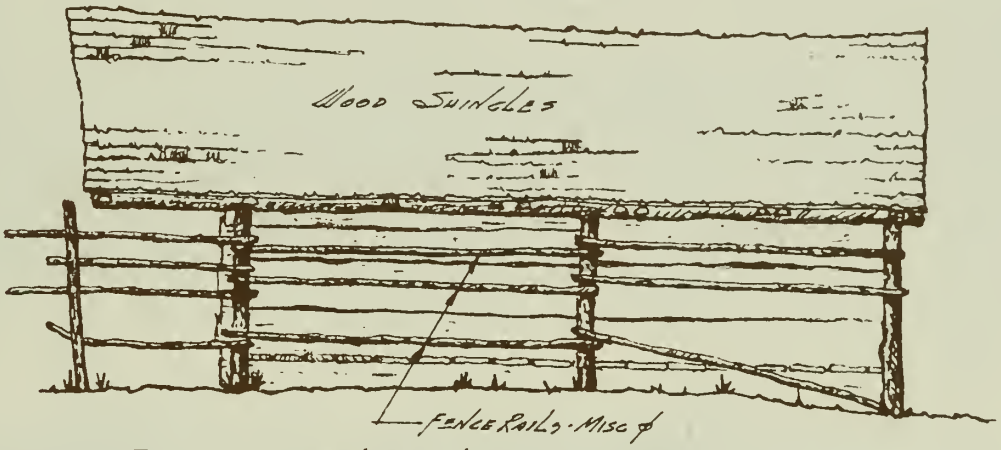
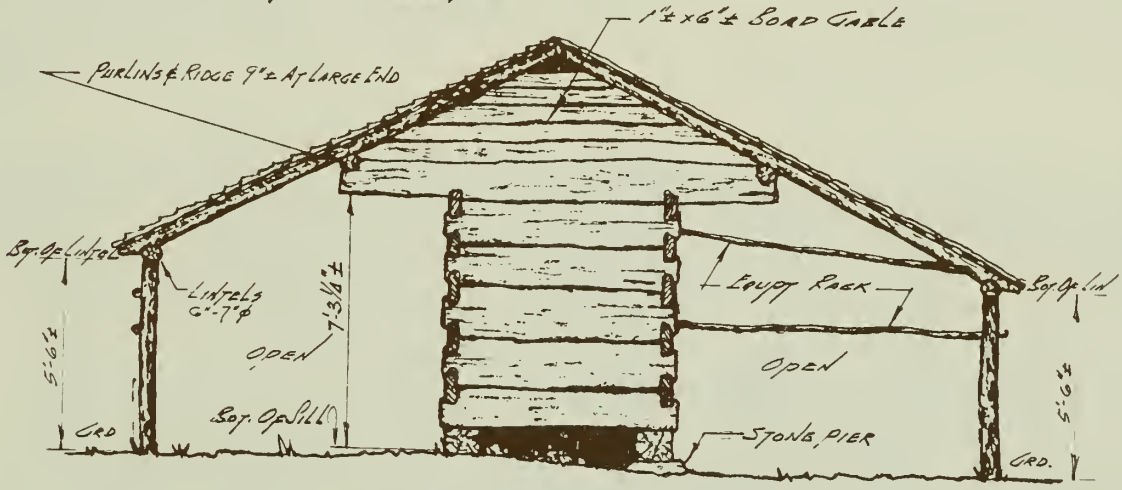


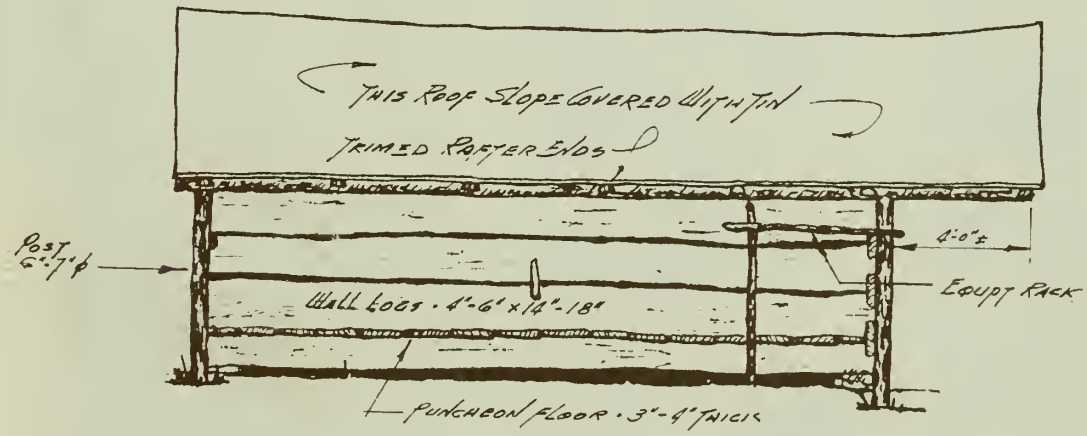
Figure 24. The north, east, south, and west elevations of the corn crib.



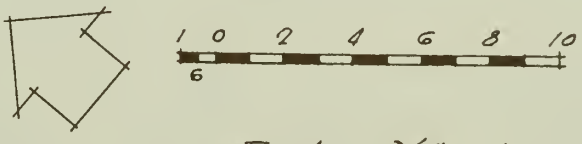
• South • Elevation •



• East • Elevation •



• North • Elevation •



• Scale • 3/8" = 1'-0"

Springhouse. The springhouse is a hewn log structure measuring 7 feet 10-3/4 inches by 9 feet 7 inches on a stone foundation (fig. 27).

The roof overhangs the front wall approximately 4 feet and is framed with rib poles (fig. 28). The present roof is plywood sheathed and covered with roll roofing for protection of the building.

The springhouse is entered through a board and batten door hung on a wood gudgeon and pintel hinge (fig. 29).

Originally the pit was stone lined and the floor may have been stone paved although there is no remaining evidence. Two shelves extend across the interior rear wall. A partially destroyed hen nest is located in the left front corner.

Figure 25. The corn crib in relation to the house.

Figure 26. The corn crib (south elevation). Note the wood shingle roof.

Figure 28. Photograph of the east elevations of the springhouse. Note the large overhang in the roof over the door.

Figure 29. The door to the springhouse. The door is hung on a wood gudgeon and pintel hinge—an example of mountaineer ingenuity in substituting wooden parts for metal hardware.

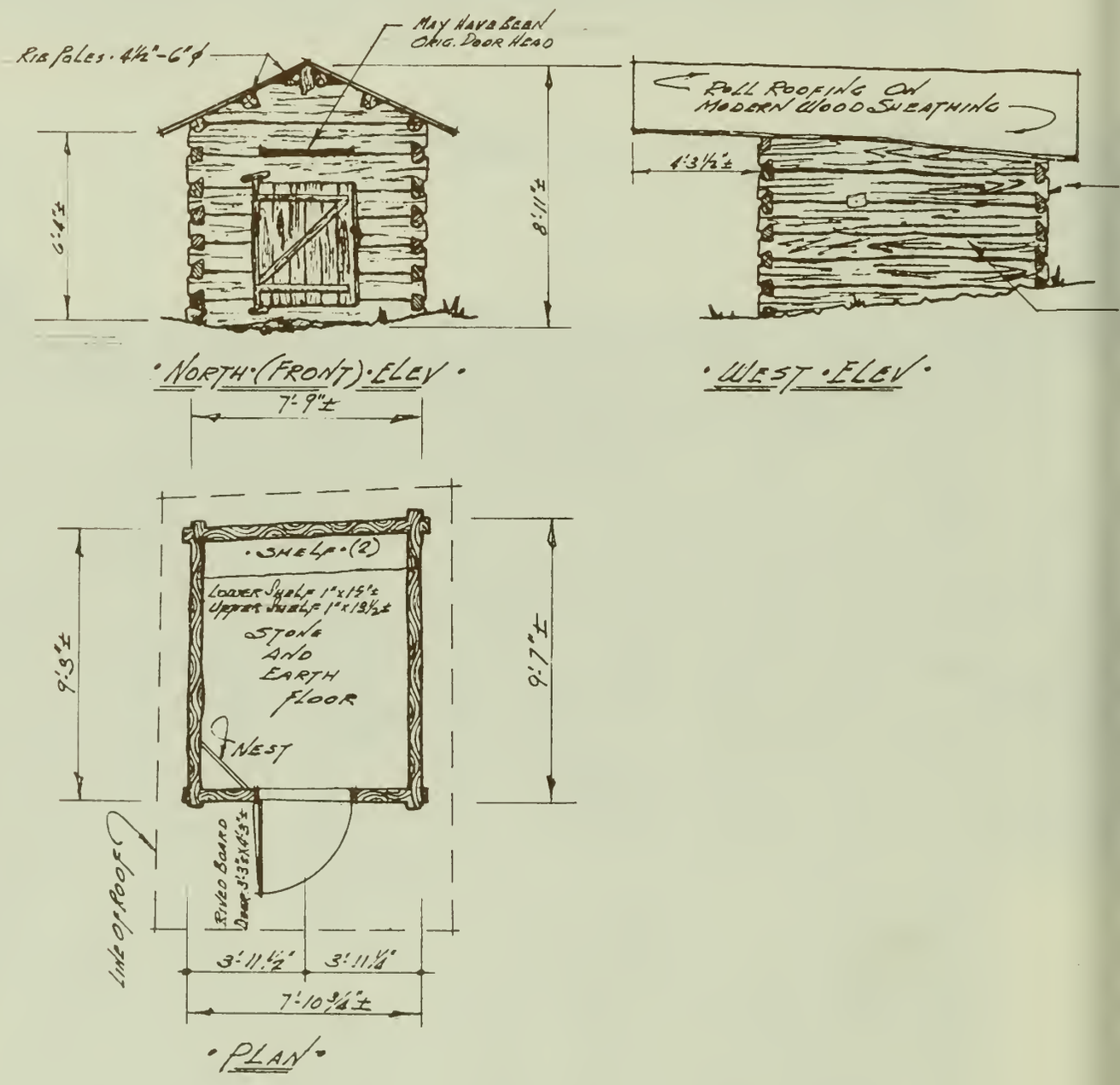
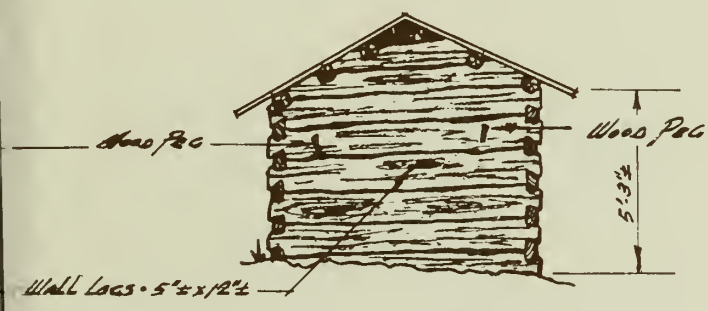
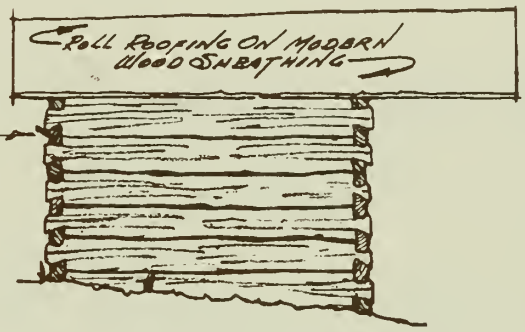


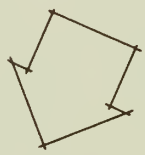
Figure 27. The north, east, south, and west elevations of the springhouse.



· SOUTH · ELEV ·



· EAST · ELEV ·



· SCALE · 3/8" = 1'-0"

Furnishings

by Robert R. Madden

After the death of Louisa Susan Walker in 1964, the last of the sisters to reside in the Walker house, the Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association acquired one hundred fifty-one objects and groups of objects from the Walker estate. All these objects are intimately associated with the Walkers, and will be displayed when the house is restored by the Park Service for its interpretation program.

Practically all of them were made or acquired by the Walkers. Most of the home-manufactured items were made by John N. Walker, while the origins of the "store bought" objects are not presently known. It must be assumed, however, that they were acquired locally.

The items included in the inventory are by no means all of the Walkers' possessions, but they do constitute an excellent cross section. Fortunately, most of the major furnishings are included in the park collection, and the minor items needed to complete the furnishings scheme can be easily purchased or made. This can be done without great loss to the historical integrity of the site.

The following is a list of items purchased by the Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association from heirs of the Walker sisters. This list was prepared in October of 1964, and any reference to the age of a particular item on the list is relative to the 1964 date.

1. Spinning wheel (wool). Charlie Walker's. Made by Davenport (Ted's grandfather).
2. 2 kraut cutters. 1 molasses paddle.
3. Jack plane.
4. Winding blade.
5. Winding stand.
6. Loom. Made by John N. Walker in 1861. 11 pieces.
7. Broom (broom cane).
8. Split basket. Made by John N. Walker.
9. Shoemaker's last.
10. Pea Sheller. Made by John N. Walker.
11. Split basket. Made by John N. Walker
12. Bed. Made by John N. Walker
13. Trundle bed. Made by John N. Walker.
14. Bed.
15. Chair, split bottom.
16. Chair, split bottom.
17. Chair, rope bottom.
18. Chair, split, bottom, high back.
19. Chair (rocker), split bottom. Made by John N. Walker.
20. Rifle
21. Walking stick, Grandmother King's, 150 years old.
22. Loom harnesses.
23. Trunk.
24. Book case. Made by Methodist circuit rider Lauson
25. Basket, split double.
26. Basket, split, 9 pocket.
27. Basket, split, 2 pocket.
28. Basket, reet (reed?).
29. Basket, split.
30. Basket, split.
31. Chest, Grandmother King's, 150 years old.
32. Clock, 70 years old.
33. Basket, willow, round. Dan's at 6 years, made by Grandmother Parry.
34. Sewing machine.
35. Box, misc. long box.
36. Box, misc. short box.
37. Flax wheel.
38. Side saddle & blanket.

39. Reel.
40. Cotton gin.
41. Cotton gin.
42. Quilting frame.
43. Basket.
44. Basket w/spools.
45. Basket w/parts of loom.
46. Scotching paddles.
47. Chair, split bottom.
48. Box, misc. tools.
49. Dutch oven.
50. Storage bin. Bee gum and dried fruit storage.
51. Fox and dinner horn. John Walker's.
52. Bed.
53. Bed.
54. Bed.
55. Bed, cord.
56. Treadles for loom.
57. Tension bar for loom and misc.
58. Winding blades.
59. Winding blades stand.
60. Loom sleys.
61. Spool rack.
62. Warping frame.
63. Work bench.
64. Tobacco barrel, log.
65. Bed.
66. Axe handles, etc.
67. Box, misc.
68. Basket of gourds.
69. Basket and misc.
70. Table, kitchen.
71. Box.
72. Box.
73. Bag of wool.
74. Box of shoe lasts.
75. Keg with churn.
76. Box with baskets.
77. Box of coverlids.
78. Box of comb boxes, etc.
79. Suit of Dan Walker's clothes.
80. Eight one-bushel baskets.
81. Bag of wool.
82. Box.
83. Baskets.
84. Baskets.
85. Banjo box.
86. Guitar box.
87. Crutches, one pr.
88. Gun stocks & blanks.
89. Wooden box, misc.
90. Corner cupboard.
91. Meal chest, 2 rolling pins, and bread plan.
92. Small cupboard.
93. Cooking paddles.
94. Iron kettle & lid.
95. Dutch oven.
96. Butter churn.
97. Dehydrating tray (inside).
98. Table.
99. Four umbrellas.
100. Drill press.
101. Kitchen bench.
102. Spinning wheel.
103. Chair, split.
104. Chair, split.
105. Chair, rope.
106. Chair, split.
107. Chair, split.
108. Part of flax wheel.
109. Box of herbs & seeds.
110. Unknown object.

111. Mirror.
112. Box of boxes.
113. Box of boxes.
114. Farrier box.
115. Box, misc., corn crib.
116. Horse collars.
117. Plow.
118. Ladder.
119. Tanbark wagon frame.
120. Small table of rived lumber.
121. Yoke for roguish cow.
122. Pot hooks for dutch oven.
123. Stretcher.
124. Five crossout saws.
125. Box, misc. iron.
126. Box, scythe blades and misc.
127. Peltboard.
128. Bundle with peavy.
129. Basket.
130. Box of clothes.
131. Drying poles from above fireplace.
132. Buggy.
133. Wood barrel, wheels, harness parts.
134. Hamper of bottles.
135. Crock, 5 gal. (?).
136. Bundle weaving bars.
137. Box of bottles.
138. Box of bottles.
139. Box of 2 gladirons & misc.
140. Box, crock, shoes & misc.
141. Bundle of fire pokers.
142. House ladder.
143. Plow (3 parts) & misc.
144. Scythe.
145. Scythe.
146. Box, misc. iron.
147. Box, misc. iron.
148. Two coverlets.
149. Kerosene lamp and shade.
150. Shoe repair "chisel."
151. Box of bottles.

NPS 180

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"There is an old weather bettion house . . .
When I tell you I love it . . .
I tell you the truth . . ."